

# How to thrive in work as we live longer

## Why a 100-year life demands new ways of working, living and sustaining energy

Gulf News · 20 Apr 2026 · BY LYNDA GRATTON | Special to Gulf News n Lynda Gratton is Professor of Management Practice at London Business School and a thought leader on the future of work.

Many of us will live to 100. And most of us will need to work well into our 70s — perhaps even beyond. Ten years ago, when Professor Andrew J Scott and I were writing *The 100-Year Life*, we began with a simple question: ‘What happens when this becomes normal?’

What we saw was that in the face of longer working lives, the traditional three-stage life — fulltime education, fulltime work, fulltime retirement — was beginning to break down. In its place, a more complex, multi-stage life was emerging, with more transitions, more reinvention, and more choice. Among people in their 30s, there is a growing awareness that working lives may stretch into their 70s — perhaps even their 80s. They are beginning to understand that this will not be a single, linear career, but a multi-stage life, with transitions, reinvention and change along the way.

In their 40s and 50s, the executives I teach are already having to pivot — adapting to new roles, new expectations, and often new identities. They are accomplished and committed but also stretched. They are managing demanding work while raising children, supporting partners, and increasingly caring for ageing parents.

Their productivity is high, but it comes at a cost. What strikes me is not their capability, but their pace. Many are working as though this is still a short race to be won, rather than a long life to be lived. They are asking: ‘How do I sustain this — not for the next year, but for the next 20 or 30?’

In my work, I have come to think about this sustaining as a weave, held together with a set of threads. At its core, this weave is made up of two types of threads: productivity and nurture. The productivity threads are our ability to contribute, to create value, to do work that matters. Alongside them are the nurture threads — our capacity to sustain ourselves over time, physically, emotionally and socially. In a long life, these productivity and nurture threads cannot be separated. As they are discovering, productivity without nurture cannot be sustained. And without the ability to contribute, nurture alone is not enough to create a life that feels meaningful over time. It is through this interplay that health becomes central.

Each of the threads makes some contribution to healthy living — but two are particularly important for sustaining health: the nurture threads of friendship and calm.

Good relationships keep us healthier and happier — full stop. In a long working life, this matters profoundly. Relationships provide continuity over time. People who know us across different stages, who help us navigate change, and who support us through moments of transition. Calm is just as important. It is the capacity to pause, to recover, and to make sense of experience rather than simply react to it.

In a long working life, this too requires deliberate attention. Those who sustain their energy over time create space for reflection and recovery. They step back from constant activity, make better decisions, and maintain the clarity and resilience needed to continue.